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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples

Dissemination of information on decolonization during the period from June 1999 to May 2000

Report of the Department of Public Information

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-fourth session, the General Assembly, in paragraph 3 of its resolution 54/92 on dissemination of information on decolonization, requested the Department of Public Information "to take measures through all the media available, including publications, radio and television, as well as the Internet, to give publicity to the work of the United Nations in the field of decolonization". The present report covers the activities undertaken by the Department during the period June 1999 to May 2000.

2. The Department's public information activities covered a wide range of issues pertaining to decolonization. The Department continued to cover the work of the General Assembly and the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Special Committee). It also continued to promote the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (1990-2000) and the Pacific Regional Seminar on Non-Self-Governing Territories, through the means available to it as well as through the mass media.

II. Support for public information activities in East Timor

3. During the reporting period, the situation in East Timor and related United Nations activities were widely covered by the news media and were the subject of the majority of the Department's information activities concerning decolonization. (Many of those activities are reviewed elsewhere in this report.) In addition, the Department played an important role in setting up and backstopping the information component of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) in June 1999 and that of the successor mission, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), which was established on 25 October 1999. A review of specific activities undertaken by the Department in cooperation with UNAMET and UNTAET is given below.

4. As a member of the needs assessment team, the Department made recommendations that became the basis of the structure, budget, and functions of the Public Information Office of UNAMET. It further seconded several of its staff to UNAMET to work in media relations and publications and helped identify information and media professionals in radio, television and print productions. The Department continued to provide support to the mission through the

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Task Force on East Timor of the Secretariat. It produced a web site in English on East Timor in cooperation with UNAMET and continued to update the site throughout the mission period. The web site became an important source of information on the activities of UNAMET and publicized the mission's work in progress.

5. As of October 1999, the Department began providing similar planning, budgeting, staffing and backstopping support to UNTAET. It continues to provide overall policy guidance on public information and logistical support to UNTAET through the interdepartmental meetings of the East Timor Task Force at Headquarters.

6. The Department established a web site on UNTAET and continues to update it with inputs from the Office of Communication and Public Information of UNTAET, including press briefing summaries, press releases, documents, regulations adopted by UNTAET, photos and a chronology highlighting the main political developments in East Timor. The business opportunities page of the UNTAET web site provides information on new commercially related legislation as well as business opportunities in East Timor.

7. The Department compiles statistics on UNTAET, including data on troop strength, personnel and budget figures, for use in its background note on peacekeeping operations. The note is distributed both in hard copy and on the Internet.

8. The Department liaised with WGBH Television (PBS) of Boston on communications and logistical questions relating to the donation by WGBH of funds to purchase radio sets for distribution by UNTAET to the people of East Timor.

9. In May 2000, the Department organized a news mission of six journalists who visited East Timor to report on the progress of UNTAET's transitional administration.

10. The Department is cooperating with the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in preparation for the first anniversary of the popular consultation in East Timor, in August 2000. The activities planned include a photo exhibit at Headquarters, a panel discussion, screening of a documentary and dissemination of a booklet to be produced by the Department summarizing the achievements of the United Nations in East Timor.

III. Press and Internet

11. A total of 40 press releases in English and French were issued by the Department on issues relating to decolonization, as part of its regular coverage of United Nations activities. They included press releases relating to the work of the Special Committee on Decolonization and the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the General Assembly. All the press releases were made available to the media at United Nations Headquarters, were distributed electronically to the United Nations information centres and services worldwide, and were posted on the United Nations home page.

12. The Secretary-General's statements, including his statement to the Special Committee of 24 and his message for the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories, beginning 25 May 2000, were highlighted to the press in press releases distributed by hard copy and on the Internet.

13. The Department issued three press releases relating to the Pacific Regional Seminar on Non-Self-Governing Territories, which was held in Majuro, Marshall Islands, from 16 to 18 May 2000, within the framework of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (1990-2000). Press releases were issued at United Nations Headquarters and put on the Internet.

14. A separate web page on decolonization was established in English on the United Nations home page, under the "Peace and Security" section in February 2000. Entitled "The United Nations and Decolonization", the page contains information on the history of decolonization, the Declaration on the Granting of Independence, the Special Committee of 24, the International Trusteeship system, the Trusteeship Council, maps of the world in 1945 and today, and press releases on United Nations activities relating to decolonization. A random sample indicates that the web site receives approximately 50 hits per day. French and Spanish versions of the page are being prepared and should be available by July 2000. A web page on Western Sahara is maintained and updated by the Department and can be found in the peacekeeping

section under "Peace and Security" on the United Nations home page.

IV. Publications

15. Each of the issues of the *UN Chronicle*, a quarterly magazine of the United Nations, published during the reporting period featured an article relating to decolonization. In issue No. 2 (1999), an article was published on the establishment by the Security Council of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) to organize and conduct a "popular consultation" to determine the Territory's status. In issue No. 3 (1999), there was coverage of the consultation in East Timor as well as coverage of the aftermath of the violence there and the worsening humanitarian situation. Issue No. 3 (1999) also carried an interview with Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, the President of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Namibia, which focused in large part on the role of the United Nations in helping Namibia achieve independence. Issue No. 4 (1999) covered the acceptance by Indonesia's national assembly of the popular consultation and the establishment of the United Nations peacekeeping force, United Nations Transitional Administration for East Timor (UNTAET). A summary of the work of the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly during its fifty-fourth session, which included a section on decolonization, was published in issue No. 1 (2000), along with continuing coverage of the activities of UNTAET.

16. During the reporting period, a comprehensive account of decolonization issues for the year 1997 was prepared for publication in the regular edition of the *Yearbook of the United Nations*. The last remaining backlog edition, covering 1990, which was published in 1999, contained 39 pages on the subject of decolonization. The 1998 edition (currently under preparation) will also contain comprehensive coverage of decolonization issues.

V. Radio

17. The Radio Service of the Department continued to cover various aspects of decolonization and related issues in its news bulletins and current affairs magazines in all six official languages and in some non-official languages. Among other items on decolonization, the radio news programmes carried reports on the work of the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly and of the Special Committee, the questions of Western Sahara and Puerto Rico, the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, the issues of small Territories, the adoption of the report of the regional seminar in Saint Lucia, the ongoing efforts to bring a speedy end to all forms of colonialism, the various issues pertaining to the situation in the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, including the seven in the Caribbean, the amendment to the decolonization resolutions to make them more relevant to the needs of the people of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, the Special Committee's appeal to the administering Powers to cooperate or continue to cooperate with the United Nations by receiving United Nations visiting missions in the Territories under their administration, and the achievements of the United Nations in the field of decolonization.

18. During the reporting period, the question of East Timor was covered extensively in radio news programmes as well as radio magazine and feature programmes in various languages for regional and worldwide dissemination. Some of the topics included developments leading up to the ballot, the voting registration process, the outbreak of violence, establishment of UNAMET in June 1999, authorization by the Security Council for the multinational force (INTERFET), the voting in large numbers by East Timorese people despite intimidation and violence, an interview with Ms. Cairn Perelli, Director of the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division, a campaign of violence by pre-integration militias following the announcement of the election result, a large-scale emergency humanitarian effort, establishment of UNTAET, the transition process to independence, deployment of personnel and setting up the headquarters of UNTAET in Dili, the International Commission of Inquiry on East Timor concerning human rights violations and the Secretary-General's visit to East Timor in February 2000.

19. In addition, the Service produced 10 regional magazines and five feature programmes on the question of Western Sahara and East Timor in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, French-Creole, Russian, Spanish and Turkish.

VI. Television/video

20. Activities within the United Nations system relating to decolonization continued to be televised and disseminated through feeds and dubs made available to networks and other television stations and through packages of television news and video highlights provided to news syndicates. The Audio/Visual Library continued to make tapes and cassettes available to correspondents, delegates, and United Nations radio producers and outside producers on decolonization issues.

21. East Timor was featured in the following "UN in Action" television programmes produced during the reporting period: a CNN World Report on "Elections in East Timor" (August 1999), programme No. 682, "The International Organization for Migration (IOM) helps East Timorese to return home" (May 2000), and programme No. 690, "The changing role of United Nations peacekeepers in East Timor" (June 2000). "UN in Action" is a three-minute video programme, highlighting a different aspect of the work of the United Nations each week. It is produced in the six official languages and is broadcast on television stations and networks around the world, including CNN.

VII. United Nations information centres

22. During the reporting period, East Timor was the all-dominating decolonization issue, and the global network of United Nations information centres (UNICs), services (UNISs) and United Nations Offices employed their full range of information tools to keep the public well informed about developments relating to East Timor and other Non-Self-Governing Territories.

23. Following are examples of activities promoting awareness of decolonization issues from around the world. UNIC Bonn's translation into German of the Secretary-General's statement on East Timor (SG/SM/7127) was used by all major media in Germany. UNIC Moscow produced six press releases in Russian, and UNIC Tunis produced and disseminated a collection of documents and resolutions about East Timor. UNIS Bangkok did five radio interviews during a donor meeting for the rebuilding of East Timor, while UNIC Buenos Aires used a radio programme to refute allegations that the United Nations had been passive in the face of violations of human rights following the referendum on East Timor. UNIC London participated in interviews on five radio and two TV programmes. UNIC Rio de Janeiro cooperated in the production of a 45-minute TV programme on UNTAET, and UNIC Islamabad participated in a current affairs programme. UNIC Rome used interviews in 10 radio and four TV programmes to generate a better understanding of developments in East Timor.

24. Many UNICs arranged briefings and debates, gave speeches and lectures, prepared articles and responded to criticism and in general devoted considerable efforts to the East Timor issue. This was particularly true for UNICs Jakarta, Lisbon and Sydney. UNIC Jakarta, for example, organized a press conference on voter registration; UNIC Lisbon produced a public service announcement "Your vote is secret" for television and, UNIC Sydney set up an interview with the Secretary-General

25. Although East Timor was the dominating issue, some UNICs also focused on decolonization in general. UNIC Copenhagen contributed to the production of a textbook in Danish on decolonization, and UNIC Ouagadougou spoke on the issue at several high schools. UNIC Sana'a translated into Arabic and disseminated press releases related to the work of the Special Committee, and UNIC Tunis produced a compilation of reports, documents and resolutions pertaining to Western Sahara. Both current and historic information material about decolonization is available to the public in the reference libraries maintained by all UNICs, and the more recent material is posted on the web sites established in local languages by 30 UNICs.

VIII. Non-governmental organizations and public inquiries

26. The Department continued to disseminate information on decolonization through briefings for

non-governmental organizations and guided tours for visitors to Headquarters, and by responding to inquiries from the public. On 17 February 2000 the Department organized a briefing for non-governmental organizations, "Update on East Timor". A political affairs officer from the Department of Political Affairs briefed approximately 200 non-governmental organization representatives, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations and a representative of the International Federation for East Timor.

27. The guided tour route at United Nations Headquarters includes a visit to the Trusteeship Council Chamber, where the role of the United Nations in the process of decolonization is explained. From June 1999 through April 2000, 372,243 visitors took the tour. Also in 1999, the exhibit on decolonization, which is located on the tour route, was significantly revamped and updated. The Public Inquiries Unit responded to 109 inquiries on questions relating to decolonization during the reporting period.